Welcome to the latest update from the A303 Sparkford to Ilchester dualling scheme

In our last newsletter we provided an update regarding the ground investigation survey work we had been doing following the statutory consultation at the beginning of the year. This update explains how we have now reached another significant milestone on the project – that being the submission of our application for a Development Consent Order (DCO).

What is a Development Consent Order, and why is it important?

The A303 Sparkford to Ilchester dualling scheme is a major development and as such it’s classified as a nationally significant infrastructure project (NSIP) under the Planning Act 2008. NSIPs require a special type of planning permission known as a Development Consent Order.

Unlike most planning permissions which are considered by local authorities, DCO applications are made to the Planning Inspectorate, which administers the application process on behalf of the Secretary of State. Following the submission of our application, the Planning Inspectorate will hold an examination in public about the scheme, before making a recommendation to the Secretary of State for Transport, who will decide whether it should go ahead.

Reaching this point – where our application has been submitted – is significant. It’s the culmination of 3 years’ worth of hard work, during which time we’ve held 2 consultations and liaised with a great many stakeholders and partners. We’re grateful to everyone who has helped us get this far, including local residents, road users, parish councils and local authorities amongst others.
**What’s in our application?**

As you’ll be aware, we’re applying to upgrade the A303 between Sparkford and Ilchester to a high quality dual carriageway. Our intention is to upgrade the road along an alignment close to that of the current A303, and create new junctions at Hazlegrove, Downhead Lane and Camel Cross.

As part of the scheme, we’ll also remove crossings and other direct accesses to improve the safety of the road. People using local roads or travelling by foot, bicycle and horse will, however, be able to cross the A303 at the new junctions we’re creating at Downhead and Hazlegrove. Our application contains information that will allow it to be properly examined, before the Secretary of State makes the decision. It also contains a copy of the consultation report which summarises the feedback we received during the statutory consultation earlier this year, along with our response to it. There are also detailed plans, and reports that fully outline the impact that the road scheme is expected to have on the environment.

*Selected existing non-motorised routes will tie into new non-motorised routes constructed as part of the scheme, to retain connectivity north and south of the new A303.*
How we responded to the feedback we had at consultation?

Taking into account the feedback we had on our proposals, most recently via the statutory consultation in January, we adjusted our plans before we submitted our application for the Development Consent Order (DCO).

Specifically, we:

- replaced the T-junction proposed as part of Hazlegrove junction with a roundabout to improve safety for road users
- amended the layout of Hazlegrove junction to make it more compact
- replaced the access to Hazlegrove House, from the eastbound entry slip road for Hazlegrove junction, with a separate private access
- changed the prioritisation at Camel Cross junction. Our plans now show that priority will be given to vehicles entering or leaving the B3151
- straightened a diagonal bridge proposed as part of Downhead Junction. This has made the layout of this junction simpler overall and cheaper to build and maintain
- removed a layby opposite the eastbound side of the Sparkford bypass
- changed prioritisation at Downhead junction to give priority to the slip road off the A303 where Downhead Lane meets Steart Hill
- changed the route of the temporary road for construction traffic, in response to feedback from people living next to the route.

As noted above, all of the comments we received during the consultation, along with details of how we have responded to them, have been set out in a consultation report. We have submitted this as part of our DCO application. This report will be available to read on the Planning Inspectorate’s National Infrastructure Planning website (as part of our submission) as soon as possible after the application is submitted.
What happens now?

Now our application has been submitted, we’re in the hands of the Planning Inspectorate while it prepares for the examination by the appointed examining inspector.

There is a fixed legal process for determining the application from here on in; this is administered by the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) on behalf of the Secretary of State. Specifically PINS have 28 days to decide whether to accept our application for examination. If it is accepted, there will then be a period of 3-4 months during which the examining inspector will be appointed and preparations are made for the examination. During this time we will publish a notice explaining that the application has been accepted and including details about how and when the public and others can register their interest in the scheme by making a relevant representation via the PINS National Infrastructure Planning website. Those who register to become interested parties will be able to participate in the examination.

There then follows a maximum period of 6 months for an appointed examining inspector to examine the application and 3 months for the examining authority to make its recommendation to the Secretary of State for Transport about whether or not development consent should be granted.

Following receipt of the examining inspector recommendation, the Secretary of State has a period of 3 months, in which to issue a decision.

From accepting an application to making a decision, the whole process should last approximately 16 months.

You can find more information on the Planning Inspectorate’s National Infrastructure Planning website: https://infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/
An update on the rest of the A303/A358 corridor

The A303 Sparkford to Ilchester scheme is just one of three planned projects designed to improve the A303/A358 corridor, creating a high quality dual carriageway link between the south east and south west. Here’s a summary of what’s happening with each of the other 2 schemes at present:

A358 Taunton to Southfields: Following a non-statutory options consultation at the beginning of the year, this scheme is expected to make its preferred route announcement in the autumn. After that there will be a statutory consultation before an application for a Development Consent Order is submitted.

A303 Stonehenge – Amesbury to Berwick Down: Taking on feedback from the statutory consultation that was held earlier this year, the Stonehenge project team is proposing 3 design changes on which it’s holding a supplementary consultation (this began on 17 July). The scheme will improve journeys on the busy A303 route and create a much-needed bypass for Winterbourne Stoke while preserving the Outstanding Universal Value of the Stonehenge World Heritage Site.

The changes, which seek to further enhance the famous landscape and reconnect the two halves of the 6,500-acre World Heritage Site (WHS), include:

- removing the previously proposed link between Byways 11 and 12 in the Stonehenge WHS to avoid affecting the setting of the Normanton Down barrow group and tranquility of the site in this area
- widening the green bridge proposed near the existing Longbarrow roundabout to improve the physical and visual connection between the northern and southern parts of the WHS
- moving the proposed modification of Rolleston crossroads to provide a more compact layout.

People are being invited to have their say on the proposed changes in a consultation that will run from 17 July until 14 August. You can find out more on the scheme webpage:

www.highwaysengland.co.uk/A303stonehenge

* A total of 8 improvement schemes were initially identified (all outlined in the booklet “Creating an Expressway to the South West, The case for the A303 /A358 corridor” which can be found on our website).
Highways England re launches its vehicle checks campaign as summer getaway begins

As the schools break up and the mad dash to the South West begins again, Highways England’s campaign team is again pushing out a range of messages about how to travel safely on the strategic road network. The intention is to ensure that the network remains free flowing, and that the number of breakdowns from otherwise preventable problems are minimised.

Almost half of all breakdowns are caused by simple mechanical problems that could be avoided with simple checks and nearly a quarter are caused by tyre problems. Meanwhile, around 22 motorists break down each day because they run out of fuel.

Highways England’s Head of Road Safety, Richard Leonard, said:

“We want all drivers to arrive at their destinations safely this summer.

“Anyone who runs out of fuel is putting themselves and other road users, including their own passengers at risk: with a few simple checks that risk can be overcome and everyone will be safer.”

Highways England has produced 5 short instructional videos featuring traffic officer Siobhan Wares, explaining how to check tyre pressure, tyre tread, oil and water levels and lights to help prevent needless breakdowns and cut the unnecessary delays they cause.

The videos cover:
- Checking tyres
- Checking engine oil
- Checking water
- Checking lights

Motorists are also being urged to:
- Check fuel

For more detailed information on how to carry out your vehicle checks, or to watch the TV advert that has been used around the campaign, visit http://think.direct.gov.uk/carchecks.html.

If you need help accessing this or any other Highways England information, please call 0300 123 5000 and we will help you.

Where to go for further information
You can find our application by going to the project page for our scheme on PINS National Infrastructure Planning website here: https://infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/projects/south-west/a303-sparkford-to-ilchester-dualling/

If you have any other queries about the scheme, or you wish to contact the Highways England project team, you can: log onto: highwaysengland.co.uk/a303-sparkford-to-ilchester
Call us on: 0300 123 5000
Email us at: A303SparkfordtoIlchesterdualling@highwaysengland.co.uk.